DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 344 407 EC 301 136

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TITLE Ethnic/Minority Children: Reflections and Directions.
PUB DATE Mar 92
NOTE 9p.; In: Challenges in Gifted Education: Developing Potential and Investing in Knowledge for the 21st Century; see EC 301 131.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Ability Identification; Access to Education; Cultural Differences; Cultural Influences; Educational Practices; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; *Ethnic Groups; *Gifted; *Minority Groups; Research and Development; Student Evaluation; *Talent Identification; Theory Practice Relationship; Trend Analysis

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines trends and issues concerning inequities in participation by ethnic/minority children in gifted education programs. The first section provides a brief historical perspective on past trends and issues concerned with the identification of gifted ethnic/minority students. Theories of cultural deficits, cultural differences, cultural diversity, and cultural specificity, as well as their impact on identification and education practices are presented. The second section focuses on the current status of research and practices concerned with gifted ethnic/minority students. New initiatives including the use of multiple criteria for identification and implications of research on multiple intelligence and the components of intelligence are considered. Recommendations encourage educators to focus on behaviors rather than relying on psychometric techniques to identify gifted students. Multicultural, cross cultural, and cultural context perspectives are encouraged for viewing giftedness in ethnic/minority groups. The final section presents implications for the future, focusing on the paradigmatic shift that is occurring in identification and programming for the gifted, especially gifted ethnic/minority students. (26 references) (DB)

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Ethnic/Minority Children: Reflections and Directions

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Introduction

Activity in the identification and education of ethnic/minority gifted children, with a special emphasis on those who are economically disadvantaged, has proceeded at an unprecedented rate since the early 1990s. Much of this activity may be the result of the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988. The hope spawned by this activity for positively changing the amount of gifted program services and the way these services are provided for ethnic/minority children is indeed promising.

The inequities of participation by ethnic/minority children in gifted programs has been and continues to be a central issue of concern. A number of writers have concluded that a traditional identification paradigm, which relies on teacher nominations and meeting a required performance level at a specific cut-off point on tests of intelligence and achievement, has been a formidable barrier to the participation of more ethnic/minority children in programs for the gifted (Frasier, 1991a). What have past research findings and practices told educators about providing gifted services for ethnic/minority students? What trends and issues are having current impact? Where do educators go from here? What are some important principles to guide future endeavors?

The first section of this chapter provides a brief historical perspective regarding past trends and issues concerned with the identification and education of gifted ethnic/minority students. Theories of cultural deficits, cultural differences, cultural diversity, and cultural specificity, as well as their impact on the identification and education of gifted ethnic/minority students, will be presented.

The current status of research and practices concerned with gifted ethnic/minority students will be the focus of the second section. Initiatives that are providing a transition to new ways of thinking about giftedness, with implications for ethnic/minority students, will be included in the discussion. Exemplary initiatives will include the recommendation to use multiple criteria, the implications of research on multiple intelligence, and the components of intelligence; recommendations to focus on behaviors as opposed to relying on psychometric techniques to determine gifted potential; and the thrust created by recommending multicultural, cross-cultural, and cultural-context perspectives as providing better approaches to viewing giftedness in ethnic/minority groups.

The final section will present implications for the future, focusing on the paradigmatic shift that is occurring in identification and programming for the gifted. The significance of this shift for ethnic/minority students will be discussed.

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Historical Perspective

Definitional Issues

When discussing ethnic/minority children and their participation in gifted and talented programs, terms have proliferated: *culturally deprived, educationally deprived, underprivileged, low socioeconomic children, inner-city dwellers, culturally impoverished, culturally handicapped, educationally disadvantaged, children of the poor, culturally disadvantaged,*

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culturally different, and *culturally diverse.* With the exception of the last two terms, a deficit or pathological condition was implied. The most extreme deficiency view implied that biological or genetic inferiority grew out of the controversial theory of racial differences espoused by such researchers as Arthur Jensen. More moderate views have focused on environmental deficiencies in the home and the community.

Noting that deficiency theories provided very limited views of gifted potential in ethnic/minority groups, such terms as *diverse* and *different* began to emerge in the early 1970s. Much of E. Paul Torrance's earlier writings forecasted the need to focus on defining culturally different gifted children in terms of strengths, especially creative strengths. This theme of strength was also evident in the work of Catherine Bruch who advocated differential scoring of tests for ethnic/minority students. That is, she advocated only scoring those test items that reflected the strengths of different cultural groups; those items that did not reflect a strength were not considered in the scoring.

Culturally different, a term that became popular in the 1970s, referred to those children who were economically disadvantaged as well as to members of a culture other than the dominant culture. This term was soon replaced by *culturally diverse* in an attempt to focus attention on the positive aspect of diversity and to get away from the negative tone of *different* (Frasier, 1977).

Baldwin (1985) considered cultural diversity as one of three interrelated variables that describe the unique needs of ethnic/minority children. She saw cultural diversity as a condition of racial, ethnic, language, or physical difference from a dominant culture. The other two variables were socioeconomic deprivation, a condition of legal or de facto denial of social interaction combined with substandard housing and jobs, and geographic isolation, a condition of being geographically isolated from mainstream cultures.

More recently, however, the culture-specific approach has focused attention on describing the behaviors of gifted ethnic/minority children within the context of their culture. An outcome of the culture-specific approach was an increase in the number of gifted programs developed for specific cultural and economic groups.

A response of the 1980s has been to shift the emphasis from defining specific cultural groups to including a wider variety of subgroups of gifted children. In a special issue of *Journal for the Education of the Gifted,* Gallagher (1987) referred to the subgroup of gifted children who are poorly recognized and insufficiently supported in gifted programs as the "gifted underserved." In this same issue, Whitmore (1987) defined underserved populations to include all children who suffer neglect because of insufficient conditions and opportunities to nurture, stimulate, and guide the full potential of their individual abilities. In addition to ethnic/minorities, this group also included preschool and learning disabled children, gifted females, and underachievers.

Identification Recommendations

Several identification procedures have developed out of the theoretical approaches to giftedness in ethnic/minority groups. Based on the culturally different and culturally diverse approaches, these procedures tended to emphasize multiple expressions of intelligence in the child's cultural context.

The Baldwin Matrix (Baldwin & Wooster, 1977) was an example of a procedure designed to facilitate the use of a variety of objective and

subjective techniques to assess exceptional abilities. Results from several studies have demonstrated its usefulness in increasing the number of ethnic/minority students served in programs for the gifted. The System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment (SOMPA) was another procedure (Mercer & Lewis, 1978), the goal of which was to evaluate intelligence by comparing information on a child with that of children from the same cultural and economic background.

Summary

Although tremendous progress has been made in the search for workable solutions to the challenge of adequately identifying and serving ethnic/minority students in gifted programs, the problems are still not fully solved. Several recent studies have documented the large underrepresentation of ethnic/minority students in gifted programs. The ratio of non-ethnic/minority students to ethnic/minority students in gifted programs is approximately 5:1, a ratio that has persisted since the early 1970s (Frasier, 1990a).

One explanation may be how society has viewed cultural differences. A perspective that has come from anthropologists and sociologists is that the theory of cultural differences comes from social learning theory and suggests that behaviors are context-sensitive. Because particular behaviors tend to be produced in response to significant features of the contexts in which they have been learned or practiced in the past, these behaviors do not represent deficits. Rather, they are functional behaviors when displayed in the appropriate context. Contributing to the complexities surrounding gifted ethnic/minority students, however, is the fact that these context-sensitive skills, strengths, and values may still be seen as irrelevant or maladaptive in schools or institutions based in principles of mainstream Anglo-American culture.

The Current State of Affairs

Beginning in the 1980s, the field of gifted education has been involved in major changes. Some of these changes reflect concepts that have long been advocated to address the concerns of gifted ethnic/minority children. Others provide a foundation for developing new perspectives.

Definition and Identification Issues

The trend toward focusing on the diversity within gifted populations is beginning to grow. A special issue of *Gifted Child Quarterly* in 1982 provided a perspective on this trend. The intent of this issue was to reverse or eradicate some of the myths in gifted education. In this issue, Treffinger (1982a, 1982b) noted that the narrow definition and identification procedures used in gifted education have spawned a notion that the gifted are a single, homogeneous group of students. He urged the recognition of the many kinds of characteristics, strengths, talents, aspirations, and needs represented in this group and recommended that the focus of identification be shifted to procedures that facilitate the search for unique characteristics or indicators of behaviors. This shift necessitates using both qualitative and quantitative data to identify gifted students; using identification data to make placement and instructional decisions; and considering the identification process as a means of examining the most appropriate paradigm, not just one of selecting the best tests or instruments.

These recommendations reflect the earlier concepts of cultural differences and cultural diversities, but not that of cultural deficits. In a volume edited by Maker & Schiever (1989), similar recommendations were made by the contributing authors :

- Use multiple assessment procedures, including objective and subjective data from a variety of sources.

- Include culturally and linguistically appropriate instruments in the referral and testing process.
- Use a case study approach in which a variety of assessment data is interpreted in the context of a student's individual characteristics and decisions are made be a team of qualified individuals.

Focus on Gifted Behaviors

Several writers have urged a shift from psychometric techniques as the sole means of determining gifted potential to a focus on gifted behaviors as a more reliable and comprehensive way to view gifted potential. A strong proponent of this shift to gifted behaviors has been Joseph Renzulli who has forcibly argued that the search for exceptional potential should shift from one of unequivocally identifying the gifted to one of concern for developing gifted behaviors. Gifted behaviors can be developed; a focus on identifying those who are *the* gifted and those who are not does not provide the needed base for program development.

Advocates for gifted ethnic/minority students have long recommended the need to focus on gifted behaviors, especially as they are differentially manifested in various groups. For example, Baldwin (1985) noted that since minorities may exhibit many behaviors that represent their adaptive responses to environmental circumstances, dimensions of these behaviors should be considered in terms of their giftedness. She developed a list of relevant behaviors and provided a description of ways in which these behaviors might be observed in the classroom.

Gay's Comparative Characteristics Checklist (1978) translated a list of common concepts of giftedness into a list of behaviors that describe how these characteristics might be manifested in gifted black children. To sensitize nominators to the differential appearance of gifted behaviors in children, Frasier (1989) compiled a list of behaviors associated with gifted children in general. These behaviors were matched with behaviors associated with gifted disadvantaged children. Frasier's compilation of common behaviors reflected the list of mental talents held in common by advantaged and disadvantaged students, developed by Gallagher and Kinney (1974).

Other examples include Bernal (1974), who developed a specific checklist of gifted behaviors demonstrated by Mexican-American children, and Tonemah (1987), who created a checklist delineating creative behaviors of Native-American children. The Torrance Checklist of Creative Positives (Torrance, 1977) is an example of a checklist that emphasized the behavioral strengths of disadvantaged children. Torrance was primarily concerned with identifying the talents of culturally different students from low income families.

To further understand this notion of gifted behaviors and to understand the implications for identifying gifted ethnic/minority students, researchers in the National Research Center on the Gifted project at The University of Georgia have focused on the concept of a giftedness construct:

> *Giftedness is a concept or psychological construct.... We do not measure giftedness directly.... Instead we infer giftedness by observing certain characteristics or behaviors of individuals* (Hagen, 1980, p. 1).

Further, they are examining a concept based on investigations by Hoge (1988) that the choice of instruments and procedures to evaluate giftedness should reflect the range of traits, aptitudes, and behaviors (TABs) that define giftedness or gifted potential in a particular situation. Following this

lead, 10 general categories of TABs were identified to represent the giftedness construct and to guide the selection of assessment measures for identification procedures: motivation, interests, communication skills, problem-solving ability, memory, inquiry, insight, reasoning, imagination/creativity, and humor (Frasier, 1991b). Investigations are underway to explore the validity of these TABs in helping teachers to observe gifted potential and in guiding the selection of test and nontest measures to evaluate exceptional performance.

The Multiple Intelligence and Componential Concepts of Intelligence

Much has changed regarding how intelligence is to be viewed. No longer is intelligence considered to be fixed or single-faceted. Prominent among those who have contributed to this expanded view of intelligence are Robert Sternberg and Howard Gardner. Sternberg (1986) conceptualized a triarchic theory of intelligence that focuses on three mental processes to explain an expanded and more accurate view of intelligence, and Gardner (1983) provided a theory of multiple, relatively independent intelligences. Both theories have contributed to a reconceptualization of what constitutes intelligence and how it should be measured.

Those who support cultural difference, cultural diversity, and culture-specific views of ability have repeatedly affirmed the notion of different kinds of intelligences. However, their advocacy efforts have not been in support of a single measure of intelligence. Their recommendation simply has been to use scores from tests along with other criteria to assess for gifted potential.

Almost no one disagrees in principle with this recommendation to use tests as one piece of information when making decisions for placement in gifted programs. However, in practice, there does not yet appear to be active endorsement of this principle. Performance at a specified level on an intelligence or achievement test is still the primary method used to certify children as eligible for gifted programs. Current findings and discussions on intelligence and its evaluation make it increasingly clear that a solution must be found to eradicate this discrepancy between recommending multiple criteria in principle and relying on a test as a sole measure of exceptional ability in practice (Frasier, 1991a).

Multicultural, Cross-Cultural, Cultural-Context Perspectives

In a very provocative article, Kitano (1991) suggested that a multicultural education perspective can help bring much needed clarity to issues of practice in serving the culturally diverse gifted. She suggested that such a perspective would cause educators of underrepresented gifted learners to articulate, reflect on, and perhaps modify their values with regard to cultural diversity.

In a response to that article, Frasier (1991c) agreed with Kitano but questioned whether such a perspective would be sufficient to address the persistent issues and misperceptions associated with identifying and serving culturally diverse gifted students. Frasier suggested that the answer would be an unqualified "yes" if a multicultural perspective was equally applied across all groups, regardless of race, creed, gender, socioeconomic status, or handicapping condition. She suggested that the answer would have to be "no" if such a perspective was used only to apply to ethnic/minority groups.

In support of the cross-cultural, cultural-context perspectives, Rogoff and Morelli (1989) emphasized the need for cultural research with minorities to focus on examining the processes and functioning of the cultural context of

development if a deeper and broader understanding of human nature and nurture is to be developed. However, when observing ethnic/minority children and interpreting their behaviors, the emphasis should be on the individual child, with attention given to the inter- and intragroup differences in values and other cultural characteristics (Maker & Schiever, 1989). That is, individual factors, rather than membership in a particular cultural group, are recommended as the basis for comparison.

Program Applications of Current Initiatives

Specifically focusing on the diversity within gifted populations, searching for unique characteristics, using qualitative and quantitative data to make decisions for placement and instruction, specifically focusing on gifted behaviors, viewing intelligence as multiple and componential, adopting a multicultural perspective, and using a cultural-context approach were discussed as examples of new initiatives in gifted education that appear to be pushing the field toward new paradigms. Each of these initiatives has important implications for improving the way gifted ethnic/minority children are identified and served and for improving the way gifted children in general are identified and served.

Future Implications

Increased attention has been paid to improving methods for identifying giftedness in ethnic/minority groups. But where do we go from here? Some basic elements to guide future endeavors include the following (Maker & Schiever, 1989):

- Recognizing the diversity within cultural groups as well as differences between cultural groups when designing identification procedures, curriculum, and instruction
- Recognizing the influence of language when assessing for giftedness
- Focusing gifted programs for ethnic/minority students on the development of abilities valued by them, valued by their culture, and necessary for success in mainstream culture

One of the most obvious implications of the suggestions offered in this chapter is that following the best practices in gifted education provides the best guidelines for better serving gifted ethnic/minority students. The following principles are offered as a guide (Frasier, 1990b). In school districts where these principles have been applied and where data from a variety of test and nontest sources were interpreted from a profile, the enrollment of ethnic/minority students in gifted programs has increased from 3% to 22%.

1. *Focus on the diversity within gifted populations. The gifted are not a homogeneous group, nor do they express their talents in the same way.* The diversity in gifted populations has always been recognized by practitioners and researchers. There is no such thing as "the gifted child." Gifted children differ as much from each other as they differ from those whose gifts and talents are not extraordinary. The most noticeable things about them are their potential and the diverse ways in which they express that potential. The procedures used to identify gifted children must be as diverse as the ways in which they demonstrate their potential.
2. *Adopt a goal in inclusion, not exclusion.* The identification of children whose adult performances will warrant the label of giftedness is, and always will be, an inexact science. There are numerous examples of people who were not recognized as having potential for superior performance during their childhood. One good way to describe the need to be more inclusive is to cite the epitaph supposedly engraved on a

tombstone in Connecticut: "I told you I was sick." It seems that educators would be safer to err on the side of inclusion, rather than exclusion.

3. *Data should be gathered from multiple sources; a single criterion of giftedness should be avoided.* A continuing hallmark of recommendations for identifying potential in children is the use of multiple criteria. The complex, multidimensionality of giftedness requires that no conclusion about a child be reached on the basis of a single piece of information.
4. *Both objective and subjective data should be collected.* This recommendation reinforces number three above. To say it another way, data should be gathered from test and nontest sources. Tests are not sufficient to assess all the dimensions of ability. Educators should not rely on test data alone to find students with extraordinary potential.
5. *Involve educators and noneducators who represent various areas of expertise and who know the child who is being observed.* The display of gifted potential does not just occur at school; giftedness is a 24-hour phenomenon. Persons inside and outside the school should be involved in any process to identify extraordinary gifts and talents. Educators have the responsibility to provide information about behavioral indicators of giftedness. Their responsibility requires that they get information from not only teachers but also others, such as parents, peers, and community persons familiar with the child.
6. *Implement an identification program as early as possible, plan it as a series of steps, and find a way to make it continuous.* Educators must always be sensitive to the fact that some children demonstrate their extraordinary abilities early; others do so later. They must try to avoid one-shot performance evaluations. They must plan an identification program that consists at least of a screening phase, an evaluation phase, and a recommendation phase.
7. *Give special attention to the different ways in which children from different cultures manifest behavioral indicators of giftedness.* The cultural context in which a child develops is important to recognize. For example, there are many culturally based differences in the way children demonstrate their ability to communicate effectively. Thus, the focus should be on how they use a communication tool, not on how much of it they have.

8. *Decision making should be delayed until all pertinent information on a student has been reviewed.* It is imperative that decisions not be based on incomplete data. All students who are nominated should be considered; decisions should not be made until a complete review can be made of all data collected from multiple test and nontest sources.
9. *Data collected during the identification process should be used to help make program and instructional decisions.* Identification is a useless, time-consuming process unless the information gained is used to make decisions about how to best place a student in an appropriate learning environment.

Finally, it should be clear that a search for better ways to identify and serve ethnic/minority gifted students must happen within the context of the search for better ways to identify and serve *all* gifted children. In the end, the goal must be to find those children with exceptional potential and to provide them with appropriate learning experiences to develop that potential. This is their right, regardless of racial or ethnic group membership, gender, wealth, or handicapping condition.

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